

WASHINGTON, D.C.
NATIONAL OBSERVER
JAN 10 1976
WEEKLY - 546,024

'Beleaguered Amateurs' or 'Almost Professional'

The Fifth Estate and a CIA Agent's Death

By Robert W. Merry
FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

I GET REALLY upset," says Tim Butz, his jaw taut and his voice firm, "that the American people don't understand that the CIA has seen it to unilaterally exercise some of the most serious violations of their rights. Well, if the agency wants to break the law, they will simply have the whistle blown on them."

He pauses just a second, relaxes just a bit. "That may sound like boisterous talk, given the resources of the Fifth Estate, but we know what effect we've had and we know what effect we will have."

That might indeed sound like bolsterous talk; then again, it might not. After all, Tim Butz is a top organizer at the Fifth Estate, the dissident organization that publishes a once-obscure quarterly magazine called Counter-Spy. And some people believe that Counter-Spy is at least partly responsible for the death of Richard S. Welch, the Central Intelligence Agency's Athens station chief, who was gunned down outside his home just before Christmas.

Antiwar Remnant

The Welch assassination came less than a year after Counter-Spy identified Welch, who normally worked under a State Department cover, as CIA station chief in Lima, Peru. Subsequently transferred to Greece, he was fingered by an English-language newspaper in Athens about a month before his death.

The incident immediately yanked the Fifth Estate, Counter-Spy, and Butz from the closet of obscurity in which they had been operating quietly the past three years. And it quickly became clear that they represent one of the most significant remnants from those fervid antiwar years of the 1960s and early '70s.

"The Fifth Estate has been passing itself off as a beleaguered amateur group," says David Atlee Phillips, former CIA agent and one of the country's leading defenders of the agency, "but the degree and depth of their efforts to identify CIA people have shown them to be almost professional, in my view."

Common Knowledge

Butz, a bearded and burly veteran of the antiwar legions, vigorously rejects the notion that there's any connection between Counter-Spy and Welch's death.

"The allegation is ridiculous," says Butz, sitting in his fourth-floor office in downtown Washington. "The CIA talks as though we printed a definitive book on all CIA operations in the world. All we've really done is make available to the American people knowledge that is common in these foreign countries. Station chiefs are known in all the cities where they operate; the only place they aren't known is in the United States."

Butz and others believe CIA Director William Colby, who acknowledged Welch's CIA connection and denounced the Fifth Estate almost immediately after the shooting, is attempting to draw a connection between the Welch killing and Counter-Spy to dampen more-conventional efforts to expose CIA abuses. "Who are they out to silence?" asks Butz. "Going after us is like calling in a B-52 strike to wipe out a couple pesky mosquitoes. I think the target is broader than the Fifth Estate; it includes Sen. [Frank] Church's Senate investigation [of CIA abuses] and the House investigation as well."

Attack From the Post

But the Fifth Estate's critics aren't confined to traditional CIA defenders. Some of the severest criticism was found last week on the editorial page of the Washington Post, that tribunal of tough-minded liberalism. Declaring that disclosure of Welch's name was "tantamount to an open invitation to kill him," the Post added: "Here are some American foes of the CIA adopting the morality and even abetting the technique—indirect assassination—which they have so often described as characteristic of the agency itself."

The Counter-Spy controversy left many wondering just what this Fifth Estate organization is, who runs it, what it does, and who finances it. The group's most important patron, it turns out, is Norman Mailer, the author and gadabout of leftist causes, who began supporting Butz's efforts in early 1973.

At that time, Butz and a friend named Winslow Peck were trying to initiate an organization to heighten awareness of U.S. security agencies. Butz, "an idealistic Kennedy liberal" when he first shipped out to Vietnam as an Air Force enlisted man in 1966, had been an antiwar activist since 1969. Peck's background, which was similar, included a stint in the Air Force Security Service.

'Largest Sustainer'

In addition to publishing Counter-Spy, the organization is involved in "public education" (teach-ins, speaking tours, and the like) and in "independent research efforts." Included under the latter category is the formation of a research library called Intelligence Documentation Center (IDC), financed through a \$50,000 grant from the Stern Foundation of New York City. Butz emphasizes that the IDC is not connected with Counter-Spy.

The magazine, which has a circulation of about 3,000, is sustained by subscription fees and contributions from a network of patrons, or "sustainers," according to Butz. Mailer is "probably the largest" sustainer, says Butz; another Fifth Estate official says Mailer's contribution has been as much as "several thousand a year."

Butz says the publication is an "off hours" operation. Staff members, who aren't salaried, are maintained financially through other endeavors, including bartending, the GI Bill (Butz himself is an undergraduate student), and "outside consulting." Some Fifth Estate officials also draw salaries from the \$50,000 Stern grant.

Guiding the publication is an advisory board, which reads like a mini-Who's Who of old antiwarhorses. And at the top of the list is Philip Agee, the former CIA case officer whose recent book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, was sprinkled with names of old agency colleagues.

David Phillips, the CIA defender, calls Agee "the granddaddy of the idea" of exposing CIA agents abroad. The Fifth Estate, he says, is the first American group to follow up on the idea.

The same Counter-Spy issue identifying CIA station chiefs contained an article by Agee in which he advocated "the identification, exposure, and neutralization" of CIA agents abroad. He added: "Having this information, the peoples victimized by the CIA . . . can bring pressure on their so-often compromised governments to expel the CIA people. . . . And in the absence of such expulsions . . . the people themselves will have to decide what they must do to rid themselves of CIA."

continued